Ag Talk

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Newsletter from the Leduc District Office

Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development
Agriculture Financial Services Corporation
Alberta Reduced Tillage Initiative
Alberta Pulse Growers Commission

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Alberta
AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Cindy Bishop.....Rural Development Specialist-Organizations
George Rock.....Farm Management Specialist
Roger Andreiuk.....Cereal & Oilseed Crops Specialist
Bob Buchanan.....Ag Water Specialist
Leanne Chubocha & Liz Ross
.....Client Service Representatives

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Club Membership

By Cindy Bishop, Rural Development Specialist – Organizations – Leduc

Marketing and production clubs have long been part of the agricultural landscape in Alberta. Though typically independent in nature, producers do band together when there's good reason. In the case of marketing and production clubs, the incentive is shared interests and potential economic gain. Clubs are a way for producers to educate themselves about marketing and production, tap the knowledge and experience of their fellow producers, and connect socially.

The University of Alberta, in partnership with Alberta Agriculture, Food & Rural Development, has just completed a project called "Analysis of Determinants of Agricultural Marketing and Production Clubs". The Farm Business Management Program (FBMP) funded the research. For the first time we can see what makes these clubs tick!

Clubs across Alberta were evaluated with an eye to how you establish, operate and maintain successful clubs. While marketing and production clubs look promising, their ultimate success depends on several key factors:

The *structure* of the club is paramount. Clubs tend to function more effectively when there are 10-15 members. A club can focus its efforts when it is well organized with regular

meetings, agendas, and an executive committee.

Outside resources, eg. Financial support, information or expert speakers, impact on the sustainability of the club.

In the minds of club members group discussion, timely delivery of information, and a club lifespan over three years, are the three most important factors. Opportunities for good discussion can be a real strength. Members feel comfortable about openly expressing their opinions and sharing information about their operations and experiences.

Goals feature front and centre. Setting, evaluating and achieving club goals contributes to both club success and member satisfaction. Clubs with written challenging goals have the edge.

Clubs require leaders who can motivate members, guide them towards achieving goals and offer new and interesting ideas.

Members must be active for the club to succeed. Participation gives the members a sense of ownership and commitment. It ensures that the topics covered or information provided, captures the interest of the group.

Many producers join clubs to acquire knowledge and skills that will increase their income. While increased income and decreased expenses are significant, they don't stand alone. Other benefits such as reduced risk and increased confidence in making decisions, sit in balance with economic gains.

It seems that not all marketing and productions clubs are created equal. While some offer real benefits to their members, others are less effective. These research findings tell us how to increase the odds of success. We may be able to use this information to strengthen other grassroots organizations in our rural communities.

Contact Cindy Bishop, Rural Development Specialist-Organizations at 986-8985 for more information on this research project.

Solve Iron Problems in Your Well Water

By Bob Buchanan, Agricultural Water Specialist – Leduc

It is important to thoroughly assess the iron problems in your well water before jumping to conclusions about its severity or how you can solve the problem.

Iron problems in rural well water can range from minor nuisances to serious problems depending on how much mineral iron and/or iron bacteria are present. Solutions can range from a $10 to $20 shock chlorination treatment to a $1000 to $4000 water treatment system.

With thousand dollar solutions to ten dollar problems, start with the ten dollar solution first. But take your time to make a decision and chances are you and your water quality problems will be solved. The first step in diagnosing an iron problem is to determine how much of the problem is caused by an accumulation of iron bacteria in the well and how much is caused by either dissolved or particulate iron in the water.

Start with a few simple visual observations:

- If **iron bacteria** are present, there will be a buildup of rusty colored slime in the water tank behind the toilet.
- Another typical symptom of iron bacteria problems is a gradual increase in taste, odor and staining problems over time. Iron bacteria can also buildup on the pump screen or well casing and also inside water pipelines and gradually begin to plug these.
- If **mineral iron** is the main problem then a hard rusty colored deposit will accumulate on everything in the toilet water tank.

If your well has an iron bacteria problem, the first step is to thoroughly **shock chlorinate** the well and water system. The treatment is very easy to do yourself.

Put a strong solution of chlorine bleach plus water down the well. This chlorine solution is generally left in the well and water distribution overnight-or up to a couple of days-and then pumped from the well and discarded. (See diagram page 3).

Generally shock chlorination treatments of a well once or twice per year will make a dramatic improvement in well water quality. Detailed information on how to shock chlorinate your well can be obtained from a water specialist.

However, if your well has been thoroughly shock chlorinated with little or no reduction in rust staining, then iron bacteria are not a significant problem. Instead, either dissolved or particle mineral iron are the problem, and water treatment equipment will be required to improve your water quality.

Do Chemical Analysis before buying treatment equipment

Before you purchase water treatment equipment, have an independent laboratory do a thorough chemical analysis of your well water.

The analysis will help identify any other substances that might require removal. It's also very important to know the pH and tannin levels of water as they could complicate iron removal. This analysis will help you select the most appropriate water treatment system for your well water. But before you start looking at systems, you might want to get some recommendations from an independent water quality specialist.

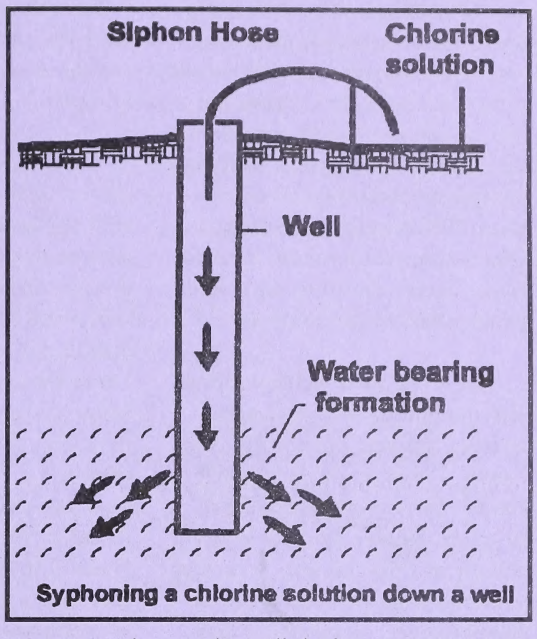
After getting those recommendations, invite several water treatment companies to your home and ask them for their recommendations on water treatment systems to solve your iron problem. Don't be surprised if you receive several different recommendations from these companies.

If you are confused, keep asking questions of the companies or of an independent specialist until you feel comfortable making a decision.

Before you make a decision, compare the costs, the warranty on the equipment and the company's reputation as well as any traveling and service costs.

Don't be fooled by companies that say they sell the best equipment and that their equipment never breaks down. All water treatment systems will require maintenance after several years.

Often water wells have a combination of mineral iron and iron bacteria. In these situations a combination of water treatment equipment and shock chlorination may be required.



Syphoning a chlorine solution down a well

Year 2000 (Y2K) On the Farm

By George Rock, Farm Management Specialist – Leduc

Prepare as if there will be an ice storm this winter. We know the date but not consequences. It's not really an ice storm, but the Year 2000 when the date changes from 31/12/99 to 01/01/00 or January 1, 2000. The problems are in computers, which shouldn't be too much of a problem on farms , and in embedded chips, which could be. Any personal computer, other than a MacIntosh, older than a Pentium is suspect, check with your dealer. Any damages resulting from Y2K such as non-compliance in such issues as animal welfare problems and the environment are not insurable. The consequences could be machinery, milking machines and ventilation systems which won't work. Accordingly, there may not be a problem, but you must be prepared. In addition, you need to know which systems are a problem before June 30, 1999 to be eligible for 100% write-off on your capital cost allowance for tax purposes. Under this provision, new replacement Y2K hardware and software must be purchased between January

1, 1998 and June 30, 1999. Unincorporated businesses, (including most farmers) and corporations not subject to the Large Corporation Tax qualify for a 100% deduction on expenditures up to $50,000 on equipment and programs to become Y2K compliant. Contact your accountant for more information. Remember there are severe penalties for fudging dates.

Some risk areas include utilities, telecommunications, automated systems, security, finance and commerce. Down on the farm you'll need to inventory your business, prioritize systems, find out which comply and test the rest. Inventory your computer systems, technical infrastructure, suppliers (e.g. prepared feeds), buildings and purchasers (e.g. finished hogs, poultry). Separate these into Y2K compliant, Y2K likely, Y2K not compliant and Y2K don't know. Find out which applications are critical, the time frame in question, and cost of fixing the problem. "What can you do manually if the systems fail? If you can't supply a critical need manually in the event of failure, you'd better start asking questions now." says Barbara Warner with Canadian Federation of Agriculture. There are 4 'Rs" about systems that don't comply: re-engineer, replace, retire or repair.

Equipment issues include: machinery, ventilation systems and systems like milking machines. Any farm equipment which data can be downloaded to a dealer's analytical computers is suspect, check with your dealer. For example, John Deere Data Interchange translators below model # 3010 will no longer have John Deere support after December 31, 1999. If you have a Cummins engine, for example found in Versatile and Ford New Holland tractors, ask your dealer as they have a list of products which are compliant or need upgrading.

If you are a dairy farm manager, ask your milking machine supplier about your machine. You don't want to be milking 75 cows by hand New Years Day! Alfa Laval Agri, among others, lists a number of systems with Y2K problems. Aerotech, makers of ventilation systems says some Looped Controls that communicate with personal computers need to be concerned about Y2K. And the list goes on...

Alberta Agriculture, Food & Rural Development has a number of resources to help you prepare: for an introduction ask for Agdex 811-1 "A Year 2000 (Y2K) audit for the farm", and on the home page of our award winning website, www.agric.gov.ab.ca there is a Y2K logo (see above), click this for more resources. Included is a printable check list. For those without a computer I have copies available at our office in Leduc. Additional information will be posted as it becomes available.

Preparing for an ice storm is a realistic way of dealing with this problem. Remember it's not a question, of Cause, it's a question of Consequence, to your business, your family and your community. Be prepared with: access to currency, food supply, water supply, shelter, batteries, medical supplies, hard copy printouts of books and records like bank accounts, payroll etc., power generation and fuel. I don't want to be an alarmist, but there will be problems, the trouble is we can't be sure exactly where they will be. Remember, January 1, always falls in the middle of winter!!

Does Your Crop Variety Measure Up?

By Roger Andreiuk, Cereal & Oilseed Crops Specialist – Leduc

Alberta Management Insights (AMI) - see the "Of Special Interest" section of this newsletter to get the low down on the Alberta Management Insights program. This program takes crop production information from 1991 to the present time and summarizes it so you can use it to help make variety decisions and to serve as a benchmark for your area. You can see how a variety has performed and compare your crop production to the area averages. If you're comparing well that means that you're doing things right. If your production doesn't compare well then its time to take a serious look at your production practices.

This years Variety Performance factsheet (available at our office) is a first cut of the information in the data base. It covers variety performance for wheat, oats, barley, canola and peas in the Black and Dark Grey Soil zone of Alberta. In future years we hope to be able to fine

tune this program so that a producer could get variety performance and benchmark information on a smaller geographic basis (for instance at the township level).

Next time you're at our office pick up a copy of the AMI Variety Performance factsheet and don't forget to get a copy of the AMI Field Record Booklet. This booklet will help you keep better records of your farming operation.

This program was patterned after the Manitoba Management Plus Program which is very popular in Manitoba and has been running for a number of years. Have a look at their website (if you or yours are into the Internet) to see what kind of information the Manitoba farmer has. The website address is www.mmpp.com. We hope to get the Alberta program on the Internet in the future.

CROP WALKS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER WITH THE SPRING WE'VE HAD

By Roger Andreiuk, Cereal & Oilseed Crops Specialist

Well, as I write this its the tail end of May and there is a lot of seed still to go into the ground. A spring like this makes it more important than ever to walk your fields as the crop emerges and as spraying time approaches. The cool conditions experienced so far coupled with the lateness of seeding means that your crop can't afford too many more setbacks through the rest of the season. One of the best ways to reduce any further set backs is to walk those fields. By walking those fields you can spot problems as they come along and perchance take some corrective action. Be this identification of insect problems or nutrient deficiencies - the sooner you spot them, the sooner you can do something about it.

There will be a number of group crop walk sessions carried out this season. This is where a small group of folks get together for a morning or evening and walk through a number of fields looking for potential problems. The idea is that a number of farmers can share their experience and learn from one another. The Alberta Canola Producers Commission is a supporter of this concept and judging by the response we had last year with a few agricultural input suppliers and farmers we will be organizing several crop walks for this year.

Call our office or contact your local fertilizer and herbicide supplier to get a crop walk or two organized.

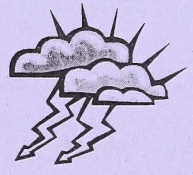
Agriculture Financial Services Corporation
Insurance: 986-4088 Lending: 986-0999 Fax: 986-1085

Insurance Division..... Val Hensch
Carol Ohrn
Karen Brenneis

Lending Division:..... Garry Poffenroth

Agriculture Financial Services Corporation

Straight Hail Insurance



Straight Hail Insurance provides producers spot loss coverage against hail damage and accidental fire damage. If only a portion of the crop is damage, then that is all the producer is paid on. For 1999, our straight hail rates have been reduced by as much as 2% in most areas. Please contact the office for a quote on what the costs would be for your crops.

Every year, crops in Alberta are damaged by big game, upland birds and waterfowl. Agriculture Financial Services Corporation administers a program that partly compensates producers for these losses. Any agricultural producer whose crop is damaged by big game (such as elk or deer), upland game birds and/or waterfowl (such as ducks, geese and sandhill cranes) can claim compensation.

However, damaged crops must either be standing or in swaths, and must not be harvested until they are inspected by an adjuster.

A Crop Insurance Policy is not required to file a claim for this program. It is important that you contact a local district office of AFSC prior to harvesting the crop.

Reminder:

Crop Insurance Clients please complete your land report and return it to the office when finished seeding.

Alberta Pulse Growers Commission
Phone/Fax: 986-9398

Janette McDonald.....General Manager
Marla Schumacher.....Secretary/Treasurer

New Field Peas Futures Contract

Winnipeg Commodity Exchange (WCE) is launching a new field pea futures contract. The contract will be traded in Canadian dollars and reflect the value of field peas within a designated region in western Canada. The new contract is similar in design to WCE's canola futures contract. Therefore, it will be relatively easy for farmers to relate the futures prices for farm cash prices. The Exchange plans to introduce the contract beginning April 5th.

Pricing Basis: Free on Board points in the Par region. Gross tonnes based on maximum 4% foreign material non-deductible.

Delivery Month: February, April, June, August, October, December

Currency: Canadian dollars

Par Delivery Region Locations: within the Provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta

Contract Size:
1 contract = 20 tonnes
5 contracts = 1 board

Deliverable Specifications:

Any grade, color, or variety of field peas (including whole, split, chipped and broken field peas) with maximum 1% heated seed, and a maximum 8% foreign material including no more than 0.01% excreta and 0.05% ergot.

Trading Hours :

9:30am - 1:15pm. CT

First Notice Day: One business day prior to the first delivery day.

First Delivery Day: First business day of the delivery month.

Last Trading Day: Seven clear business days prior to the end of the month.

Last Delivery Day: Last business day of the delivery month. Min Price Fluctuation $0.10/tonne

Daily Limit: $5.00/tonne above or below previous settlement

Alberta Reduced Tillage Initiative
Phone: 980-4898 Cell: 940-8625 Fax: 986-1085

ALBERTA REDUCED TILLAGE INITIATIVE • PHASE II

Direct Seeding In Wet Springs

By Mark Olson, Reduced Tillage Agronomist

For the farmers in north and northwest part of Alberta, the reasoning for making move from conventional seeding to direct seeding or zero till for moisture conservation has always been flawed. The climatic conditions in this part of Alberta are such that in nine years out of ten, moisture is not a limiting factor and in some years excessive moisture is more of the problem than not enough.

Direct seeding and/or reduced tillage is a new practice for many farmers. Anecdotal accounts from experienced direct seeders suggest that fields that have been under direct seeding for 5 to 7 years, are actually the first fields to get onto with equipment in a wet spring. However, the experience

with fields that have direct seeded for only one or two years (a transitional period) under an abundance of rainfall in the spring is these fields are simply wet and difficult to get onto with equipment.

Is a wet spring a scenario for farmers in the north and northwest Alberta in the spring of 1999 ? Currently, the amount of snow left on the ground is substantial, but only mother nature knows how fast it will disappear. Here are some immediate solutions for seeding in wet soils and some preventive measures for future years.

Under wet soils conditions, the whole idea is to get over the land with a single pass without sinking the tractor and/or seeding unit to the axles or rutting the field so badly that harvest operations become a nightmare. To accomplish this, the farmer must achieve maximum floatation with the seeding unit and minimum draft of the seeding tool.

There are number of factors involved that are immediate, short term solutions to wet soils in the spring.

Seeding at a shallower seeding depth will take less draft. This is the most cost effective solution, but is already a common practice for those farmers direct seeding. Seed to soil contact is paramount for good even emergence and seeding depth can only be raised so far, before the seed is sitting on top of the soil surface. Additionally, dry conditions after seeding can cause catastrophic results with shallow seeded crops because of root systems near the surface. A wider seedrow spacing can decrease draft, as well as, the total cost of the seeding tool. Numerous studies on all crops across Western Canada have found comparable yields with 9" and 12" row spacing. Theoretically a seeding unit, that has been transformed from a 9" spacing to 12" spacing , will require 33% less draft to pull the seeding tool. On the downside, swathing cereal crops is not a great option, unless done on a diagonal, since crop (especially poor, short ones) on wide rowing spacings tend to fall through the stubble to the ground and are near impossible to pick up with the combine.

For those direct seeding under a high disturbance system, replacing wide openers such as sweeps, with narrower openers like spoons, is another idea that should be examined. There is a cost associated with replacing openers as in this example, which should be weighed against renting a disc type machine from a neighbor or dealer in your area. Additionally, less soil disturbance may mean lower soil temperatures and delayed emergence and maturity.

Purchasing tires with better floatation on the power and seeding unit, while an expensive alternative, is another option to look at. Additional duals on the power unit has helped in many instances. Last, proper tire pressures and ballast, on the power unit will help pull the seeding unit through those especially wet areas. Check back with your local dealerships or tires companies to make sure your tires on the power and seeding units are within the specifications.

As for long term solutions, especially during the transitional period to direct seeding there are two factors to be wary of are; 1) straw and chaff management and 2) crop rotations.

As everyone who is direct seeding knows, straw and chaff management is critical to the success of the system. An even, wide distribution of the straw and chaff with the combine in the fall will solve 99% of your residue problems. Alternating high residue crops (ie. cereals) with low residue crop (ie. canola and peas) can additionally, assist in managing residues. Last, the use of semi-dwarf, short straw varieties should seriously be considered.

The role of crop rotation in managing wet soil conditions in the spring is two fold. In a visit last summer with Dr. Dwayne Beck, (Dakota Lakes Research Farm in Pierre, South Dakota) he suggested that soils that are too wet to seed in the spring, do not have the proper intensity in the rotation. Proper crop rotation intensity is determined by the native vegetation which is a reflection of the local, long term, climatic conditions. Intensity simply looks at the crops in the rotation and their water use. In areas where there is abundant moisture, inclusion of high water use crops such as canola and alfalfa on a more frequent basis is required (should make up 40-80% of the rotation).

The second component in crop rotations, is crops that are or can be fall seeded such as winter wheat and canola. Winter wheat varieties have improved considerably in yield and winter survivability, over the last five years and there is a developing market demand for the grain. Fall seeded crop research, canola being the most studied, continues show promising results. Polymer coatings will allow farmers to seed, not only canola, but a whole host of crops in the fall and the worry about getting on wet land in the spring may become a mute point.

Above are a number of ways to manage wet soils conditions under a direct seeding system. Hopefully these short term strategies won't have to be put to use next year in our area.

Of Special Interest... Alberta Management Insights

For years, Alberta farmers have been providing the Alberta Hail & Crop Insurance Corporation (now Agriculture Financial Services Corporation) with yield and management data from their farms. Through the Alberta Management Insights program, this information now makes up an agricultural data base that is second to none and is of tremendous potential benefit to Alberta farmers.

The **Alberta Management Insights** (AMI) program is processing this farmer supplied information using a Geographic Information System (GIS) and returning it to farmers in a user friendly format. This information payback is possible because of the sponsorship of the Canada-Alberta Farm Business Management Initiative, Alberta Agriculture Food and Rural Development and Agriculture Financial Services Corporation.

On farm **variety performance information** is now available through AMI. This on-farm information, along with scientific variety trial information will give Alberta Farmers some of the best variety performance decision tools available.

Data since 1991 has been compiled and provides meaningful production and management information for use in on-farm decision making. Alberta farmers will not only have a first rate variety selection tool, they will also have a true benchmark of the performance of their farm management decisions through their personal historic land usage summary. This summary gives the varieties grown, management practices used and compares yields to the area averages for each field.

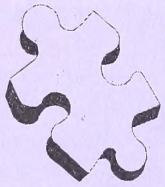
Future Plans for the Alberta Management Insights program include:

- developing a software package so you can browse through varietal performance information across Alberta by municipality, soil zone or risk area
- incorporating other information such as seeding date or fertilizer usage into the data base to come up with benchmark information for these management practices.
- developing maps on a township basis outlining the risk of weeds developing herbicide resistance by herbicide grouping.
- voluntary information contribution to the data base so that non-policy holders can participate in the farm management benefits of Alberta Management Insights.

Alberta Management Insights is administered by AAFRD and AFSC. A farmer board gives direction to and oversees the development of the program. Please call the office today if you have any comments or suggestions about AMI.

Announcements...

The challenges you face as a member or leader of an agricultural/rural or organization are many. Where can you turn for help?



Rural Development Specialist – Organizations can connect you to the people, resources, and information you need. Our motto is *Working with You to Plan, Lead, Achieve* - *Plan* for a successful future, *Lead* effectively, and *Achieve* the results you want!

We have a promotional brochure describing how you can tap our services.

Crop Diversification Centre North Field Day
Includes information on new crop (pulses, hemp, medicinal) vegetable, fruit, greenhouse and seed potato field tours.
For more information, please call Alberta Agriculture office today at 986-8985.

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